DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 149 230 CG 012 100

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TITLE Differentiation of "Masculine" and "Feminine" Among Adolescent Girls.
PUB DATE 26 Aug 77
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (San Francisco, California, August 26-30, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; *Androgyny; *Females; Human Development; Individual Psychology; Males; *Perception; Personality Studies; Research Projects; Self Concept; *Sex Differences; *Sex Role

ABSTRACT

This paper demonstrates the usefulness of distinguishing various aspects of masculinity and feminity in the study of sex roles among adolescents. Subjects, a national sample of boys and girls aged 12-16, were individually administered direct questions, checklists, rating scales, and symbolic and projective items. Results were as follows: (1) finer differentiation occurs in sets of those characteristics that are typically ascribed to the opposite sex; (2) girls are higher on Intimacy and Sociability scores, but especially high on Intimacy subscores; (3) within each sex, subscores of masculinity and femininity are correlated significantly and differentially with other sex role identification and adoption indices based on less direct symbolic and projective materials; and (4) girls, more than boys, tend to "genderize" the world around them. Findings suggest that there may be very different patterns or levels of integration of the masculine and the feminine, of the agentic and the communal. The author concludes that refined and differentiated measures of masculinity and feminity are needed. (Author/JLL)

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Differentiation of "Masculine" and "Feminine" Among Adolescent Girls[1]

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Introduction

In recent years, the topic of sex roles has received rapidly increasing interest both in theoretical writings and empirical studies. Androgyny has been advanced as a personality construct useful in understanding moral and ego development (Block, 1973), and instruments have been proposed for its measurement (Bem, 1974; Spence et al., 1974). The component elements of androgyny--femininity and masculinity--themselves have been scrutinized both as to definition and measurement (Constantinople, 1973). One problem that has not been adequately noted is that inclusion in such measures of directly gender-linked attributes (feminine, masculine) begs the question as to the meaning of dimensions to be measured and introduces spurious bipolarity.

Global definitions of masculinity and femininity used in operationalizing the construct of androgyny also present problems of interpretation. Within each sex, equivalent androgyny scores for individuals may be composed of very different aspects of the two component dimensions. Moreover, when masculinity and femininity scales are keyed identically for men and women, possibly important sex differences in the meaning of the two dimensions are ignored.

[1] Paper given at a symposium, APA convention, San Francisco, August 26, 1977.

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The purpose of the paper is to demonstrate the usefulness of distinguishing various aspects of masculinity and femininity in the study of sex roles among adolescents.

Subjects and Instruments

The data for this paper derive from a study of sex roles of the American adolescent, carried out on a representative national sample of boys and girls, ages 12-16. The sample was balanced for age, geographical area, socio-economic status, and ethnic background. Data were gathered over a three-month period in 1976, in over sixty locations in the U.S.

The subjects were individually administered a specially designed schedule for the measurement of various aspects of sex roles. The schedule was extensively pretested for ease of comprehension, maintenance of subject's interest, maximum yield of variability of endorsement of items, and adequate reliability of indices within the constraints of an average 45-minute session. Included in the schedule were a variety of materials--direct questions, checklists, rating scales, symbolic and projective items--addressing topics of family and peer relationships, self-perception and perception of various aspects of sex roles.

Selected Results

Part of the schedule was a list of thirty-nine adjectives selected from other measures of sex roles (Bem, 1974, Carlson & Levy, 1968), screened and pretested for adolescents. Separate factor analyses were carried out

for each sex, with rather different results. In each case, finer differentiation occurs in sets of those characteristics that are typically ascribed to the opposite sex. An example is given in Table 1: for boys, the typical list of male adjectives clusters in a single factor, including the tag-item "masculine"; for girls, two distinct factors emerge, Activity and Potency. Similarly, boys distinguish two groups of "communal" (feminine) characteristics--Sociability and Expressivity--whereas for girls these tend to merge. When the adjective list is keyed for these subscores of masculinity and femininity, certain sex differences are highlighted (see Table 2): girls and boys differ considerably on Expressiveness and Potency, but not much on Sociability and Activity.

On another part of the schedule, the subjects were asked to choose between communal and agentic (Bakan, 1966) characteristics (Which way is it more important to be: warm or reasonable? healthy or loved? etc.) These items likewise can be empirically clustered to reflect different aspects--dyadic-referent characteristics implying Intimacy (loved, sincere, warm, attractive) and group-referent characteristics representing Sociability (helpful, friendly, likeable, popular). Again, as seen in Table 2, while girls are significantly higher on both subscores, they are particularly higher on Intimacy.

Some Interesting Correlates

Of further interest is the fact that within each sex these subscores of masculinity and femininity are correlated significantly and differentially

with other sex role identification and adoption indices based on less direct symbolic and projective materials. For example, among girls Activity, but not Potency, is significantly and positively correlated with a femininity score based on choosing between pairs of geometric figures (e.g. open vs. closed, curved vs. angular) and with elaboration of secondary sex characteristics in figure drawings. Conversely, Potency, but not Activity, is negatively correlated with semantic symbolic femininity (soft, smooth, round, etc.) as well as Sociability, Expressivity and Intimacy scores. Interestingly, however, both Potency and Activity are positively associated with interviewer-rated physical attractiveness and with increased interest in the opposite sex (lower preferred age for dating, more opposite sex friends). Also, while for boys Potency and Activity are related to self-esteem (Potency more so than Activity), neither is related to self-esteem in girls.

What these preliminary findings suggest is that there may be very different patterns or levels of integration of the masculine and the feminine, of the agentic and the communal. Some aspects of masculinity (i.e. activity) appear to be readily adopted and simply complement and enhance a young woman's definition of herself as "feminine". Other aspects (i.e. potency) require a redefinition of self and are adopted in exchange for something that is relinquished. For example, gentleness, softness, smoothness--as traits--do not coexist well with aggressiveness and dominance. True enough, dominant and aggressive behaviors may be appropriate in certain situations, and gentleness, softness in others, and androgyny, in the abstract, is conceptualized as implying such alteration or flexibility of behavior. But agency/communion integration of that sort is of quite different order

than simple aggregation of male and female traits, and is in no way provided for in the current methods of measuring androgyny.

Another preliminary finding of our studies might also be worth mentioning in this regard. Girls, more than boys, tend to "genderize" the world around them. When presented with a list of inanimate objects, they ascribe gender pronouns to them more consistently and more in keeping with theoretical expectations and adult norms. Furthermore, they are more discriminating in their choice of peers as partners for different functions--girls as confidantes, either sex as companions, boys as partners in competitive tasks. When interpreted in the context of sex differences found in other studies--girls are more interpersonally sophisticated (Gutmann, 1965) and they tend to register higher on ego development and moral development measures--these findings suggest that differentiation of the masculine and the feminine might well be a precondition of the integration of the two. That, of course, is a rather different notion than the popular unisex interpretation of the androgyny construct, but it may be precisely the articulation of differences, rather than homogenization, that lays the groundwork for individual integrative solutions for either sex toward greater self-actualization.

In summary, we suggest that it may be fruitful to develop more subtle and differentiated measures of what have been loosely referred to as masculine and feminine domains of characteristics. Without such more refined and differentiated measures the very construct of androgyny will soon have outlived its research usefulness.

Table 1

Factorial differentiation of "masculinity"

in adolescent girls

Adjectives	Rotated factor loadings		
	Boys (N = 200)	Girls (N = 200)	
	"Masculinity"	Activity	Potency
Ambitious	50	55	-04
Energetic	51	55	-03
Adventurous	39	52	18
Individualistic	39	53	19
Competitive	57	44	33
Aggressive	46	22	53
Strong	51	13	34
Dominant	35	23	45
Masculine	56	-17	30
Attractive	46	-10	00

Note 1. Decimal points omitted

Note 2. Items with underlined loadings included in keys

Table 2

Sex differences among adolescents on selected indices of masculinity and femininity

	r_{pb} Boys(-) Girls(+) (N = 988)
Self-ascribed traits	
Activity ambitious, energetic, adventurous, individualistic	-.07
Potency aggressive, strong, dominant	-.32
Sociability friendly, happy, cheerful, likeable, helpful, generous	.12
Expressivity emotional, affectionate, loving, sincere, gentle	.26
Valued traits	
Sociability (vs. agency) helpful, understanding, friendly, popular, likeable	.14
Intimacy (vs. agency) gentle, sincere, attractive, warm, loved	.28

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